

Mary's Song

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[0 : 00] Now if you would turn with me please to the passage we read in the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 1, and beginning at verse 46. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

So we're looking at this Song of Mary from verse 46 down as far as verse 56. It's very often called the Magnificat.

As a title for the song you'll find it described as the Magnificat. In fact you find that in this translation where you find the headings given, and this one's called the Magnificat.

And that's really Latin from the idea of magnifying or making great. And that's of course based on the first line of the song, My soul magnifies the Lord.

It's very similar to what you find in 1 Samuel, chapter 2, where Hannah came to sing before the Lord. And that was in relation to the birth of the son that she was going to have, the birth of the son Samuel, where she too magnified the Lord.

[1 : 27] And there's a very close correspondence between them because Samuel was born to be a leader in Israel, and for a very important time in Israel's history, led the people for many years.

So that was a precursor, if you like, or a foretelling or a foresight of the greater leadership, of course, of the Lord himself, of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world specifically as the great leader and saviour of his people.

So here is Mary. Here is Mary pregnant. Mary having visited Elizabeth, her cousin, and as that meeting is described there in a remarkable way itself.

We find that verse 45 there, Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And then immediately after that bursts out this great song of Mary in relation to what the Lord, in fact, had now fulfilled, now that she was going to bear this child.

And here we have what we can call two important elements of praise in verse 47. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

[2 : 46] The two important elements of praise there are magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in God. And we'll need to look at these just to apply them briefly to our worship and to our own lives, that we magnify the Lord and rejoice in God as our Saviour.

Secondly, you have five good reasons for praise, following on from these two important elements of praise. There are five good reasons given as to why Mary is praising the Lord in this song of praise, from verse 48 through to verse 55.

There's God's choice, and God's method, and God's power, and God's mercy, and God's faithfulness. All of these mentioned different ways by Mary as reasons why she is now praising the Lord.

But let's look firstly at these two important elements of praise. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. And of course, that obviously is from her inner being.

You can see that her very soul is really moved, that this song of praise is not just something that is composed in her brain, it's not just something that she's using words to actually express this before the Lord.

[4 : 07] My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices. She's really tracing all of this to her very inner being, which is where praise and worship, of course, always comes from in any case.

Our soul, our spirit, our inner being is moved to worship the Lord, to magnify the Lord. Now, the word magnify, just as we do normally in its use of it, or normal use of it, means to make something large.

When you use a magnifying glass, a microscope, anything like that, that magnifies what you're seeing, it's in order to make it appear larger, so that you can see it usually in more detail.

That's why you magnify things for the most part. So, to magnify really means to make great, literally, or to enlarge. And it's applicable to our worship of God as well.

That's what Mary is saying. My soul magnifies the Lord. In other words, she's saying from the depths, from the recesses of her soul, she's engaged in something which is really designed to make God great, and to make God appear great.

[5 : 16] Not just to herself, but to anyone else who is listening. She is actually magnifying the Lord. And that applies to our worship of God as well.

That's the aim of our worship. That's the aim of our praise. That's the aim, indeed, of our very way of life. Because magnifying the Lord is the essence of a Christian lifestyle.

That's what it's about. It's making the Lord great. It's actually showing forth something of God so that he will come to be seen as great.

That people will realize there is a greatness about this God. There is something about this God that's not true of any other being. My soul magnifies the Lord.

When you go to the Edinburgh Theological Seminary or Free Church College, as it used to be known as, there is a painting there on one of the landings of the famous Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall.

[6 : 17] And it's a life-size painting. And it's a painting that's often used for people to take photos of because his hand is actually stretched out like this in the painting, his right hand.

So it's possible to take a photo of someone just strategically positioned so that in the photo, you appear as if Dr. Kennedy is placing his hand on your head.

Many people have done that simply because the photo is life-size and it's really of somebody famous in free church history at least.

In other words, there is Kennedy, a life-size Kennedy. It's not a miniature portrait. It's not something that's been reduced. It's there just in the same dimension as he was in real life.

And what Mary is actually saying is my soul magnifies the Lord. I want to make the Lord great. I want to show him his full size, if you like.

[7 : 17] I want to show him not just in terms of a miniature reflection of who he is. That's the magnifying of the Lord that applies to our worship as well, which really is a worship and a way of life is to show God, if you like, to put it this way, it's not a passport photo size of God, of a picture of God that you want to show in your life, is it?

It's not just something that you hide in your pocket and then you take out and show when necessary. Your lifestyle must be itself a portrait of God that really shows and magnifies him and shows him for the greatness that is his.

Remember the Apostle Paul when he, towards the end of his life, when he, well on in life at least, when he wrote his letter to the Philippians, a wonderful letter of love that expresses in different ways his relationship to his beloved Philippian church.

And in chapter 1 of Philippians, you remember he's saying there that he's not at all sure of whether death is just almost immediately ahead of him or whether he's going to remain, whether it's God's will that he remain for some time yet.

But he's in a strait, he says, between these two. But he says this is what he's saying. Yes, he said, I know, I will rejoice, he says, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope, that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gave.

[9 : 09] Now, that word honored there is probably not maybe the best translation, but you could translate it magnified, because it's exactly the same word that Mary is using here when she says, my soul magnifies the Lord.

Yes, she's honoring the Lord, but there's something in the word magnify that really captures what the word honor itself doesn't quite capture, and that is to make God great, or to make God appear great.

That's what the apostle is actually saying there as well. This is the burden of my life, whether I'm in prison or whether I'm released, whether I'm free or whether I'm incarcerated.

This is my aim. This is my purpose in living, to magnify Christ, whether by life, he says, or by death. But it's this, that Christ will be magnified. And we are here today to magnify the Lord, to make the Lord great in people's, in his appearance in our lives, in people's view of us, as we live our lives, not only in worship, but in a way of life too.

My soul magnifies the Lord. What is the primary aim in your own life and in my life? Is it not this? To magnify the Lord, to show that he is great, and to make him even greater in people's view, and in our own estimation too.

[10:39] That's the first thing, the first element, magnifying the Lord. But then you also have the second one, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

The rejoicing element of praise. And I think I mentioned in prayer how difficult at times it is to know a spirit of rejoicing, of gladness, of joy, in our praise, in our worship.

Because there are times in life, as you all well know, when it's difficult to express joy and rejoicing, in times of sorrow, in times of distress, in times of perplexity, in times of anguish.

And yet it's still possible, even then, to have this rejoicing in God our Savior. Because rejoicing in God is far more than just feeling good.

It's far more than an emotional thing. It's a solid confidence in God. Expressed in praise, expressed, yes, in joy, expressed in sometimes in really feeling good as well, and there's nothing wrong with that.

[11:53] But it's not the primary thing. Rejoicing is truly to have our confidence resting in God himself as our foundation. My spirit rejoices.

My spirit is glad in God my Savior. See, she's not just saying in God, but in God my Savior. God as her Redeemer.

That's where rejoicing really is grounded. That's its foundation. God our Savior. So we come to worship God not just for having a, so that we can have a feel-good factor, that we can have an emotional high.

That's not the primary emphasis in our worship. That's not the main objective in our worship. Even though we want to know gladness and joy inwardly, and our emotions to be truly stirred and exercised, the primary objective in our worship is this, to actually rejoice in the Lord, to magnify the Lord, to make him great, and therefore to know that in his greatness, we too have our foundation.

But that's not to dispel actual joy, actual rejoicing in terms of our emotional rejoicing. That also comes into what it means to rejoice in God as our Savior.

[13:25] Incidentally, isn't it an amazing thing that Mary is actually carrying a child in her womb who is also her Savior?

Just think about that. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. And although the primary reference is towards God, the God who has actually revealed this to her, that she would have this privilege, nevertheless she knows or will come to know more fully as her life goes on and as Jesus was born and as Jesus lived the life he lived and died the death he died, she came more and more to realize that this child that she had carried in her womb, that she gave birth to, that she lived to see growing to adulthood, and his death on the cross, that she had carried in her womb, the Savior of sinners, including herself.

And that's so amazing a thought in itself. But here she is saying, my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. So it doesn't expel the fact that it's rejoicing in the sense of confidence in God, God as our foundation, as our Savior.

We still feel joy and still have a right to expect that we will feel gladness and know gladness and have our spirits rejoice. Augustine, theologian from history, way in the past, but this is one of the things he wrote.

He says, There is a joy which is not given to the ungodly, but to those who love thee for thine own sake, whose joy thou thyself art.

[15:06] And this is the happy life, to rejoice to thee, of thee, for thee. This it is, and there is no other. How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of all those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose.

You drove them from me. You who are the true, the sovereign joy, you drove them from me, and you took their place. You who are sweeter than all pleasure.

There is rejoicing in God. There is sweet comfort in God. There is magnifying the Lord as the delight of Augustine's soul.

And that's what Mary is saying. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices, or is rejoicing in God my Savior. Where is the foundation of your own and my own happiness today?

Where is our happiness grounded? Is it in something more than this world and what it affords and what it offers us? Is it more than the things that will very legitimately make us glad, even in terms of

a worldly gladness?

[16:22] And sometimes there's nothing wrong with that, of course. But there has to be more than that to life, hasn't there? And this is really the foundation of true joy and lasting happiness. God himself, and God as our Savior in particular.

Well, two important elements of praise. And then he moves on, the song moves on, to five good reasons for praise. In verses 48 to 49, you first of all find God's choice.

For he has looked on the humbly state of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me.

Mary was singled out by God out of all women at the time to be the bearer of the Savior in his humanity, to be the bringer into this world of Jesus Christ in terms of his humanity and his life as the servant of God the Father.

This is really a sense of amazement built into what Mary is saying. He has looked on the humbly state of his servant. She came to realize the privilege that was hers in stages, if you like.

[17:36] Because if you go back into the chapter previously, you'll find that she's really saying, well, why me? As the angel came to reveal to her that this was going to be her privilege. And she is saying, well, she was afraid.

First of all, verse 30 there, and the angel says, verse 28 rather, greetings, oh, favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled and tried to discern what kind of greeting this might be.

And the angel said, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your woman, bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

And she's puzzled and she's amazed and she comes more and more as her life goes on to realize the privilege, the immense privilege that was hers. No other woman in history, before or after, could have this said about her, that she was the bearer of the Lord Jesus Christ and that she brought into this world a child that grew to be Jesus, the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God, taking humanity to himself and joining it to his eternal deity.

Mary is unique. And she's unique in that respect. And she appears there as somebody who is really still in a sense puzzling over why has the Lord chosen me?

[19:03] There's a sense of humility, of course, built into what she's saying. Why should she be singled out? Out of all the women there and then at that time, why should it be her? Well, she's amazed and she's grateful and she praises God for his choice of her, that he has chosen her, that he has decided this, that he has ordained this.

And, you know, that fits into something that you find throughout the Gospel of Luke. That is, that Luke very often emphasizes people who were essentially poor in life but who were favored by God. And you can see that running through the whole of Luke's Gospel. And Mary is one of that galaxy, if you like, of poor people because when she came to, in the second chapter, when you find that they came to the temple for Jesus to be presented there, the offering that she brought was an offering associated with the poor when she brought that offering to the Lord.

That's the offering of poor people. This was a poor woman, a woman who wasn't, who didn't have much in life. But yet, God chose her for this special purpose.

That is God's way. You find the same with the thief on the cross in Luke's Gospel who came to say, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[20:35] So often it is that way in God's method, isn't it? It's an important feature of how God builds his kingdom. It's not usually those who have worldly status, not those who are deemed to be worthy in a worldly sense that God chooses and uses to further his purpose, to further his kingdom.

He chooses the likes of Mary and the thief on the cross and other people who are poor in life in order to actually have his kingdom advance by that method.

When you look at a stone dyke, it's always a source of wonder when you see somebody who really is skilled in building stone dykes, stone walls, how the stones are fitted together.

And of course your eye tends to catch your eyes almost inevitably set on the larger stones and the way they're shaped, the way they're fitted together.

But actually in many ways the most important stones are the small ones, the ones that are wedged in between the big ones because they are the ones that hold the big ones in place.

[21:53] They are the ones that support the big ones. They are the ones that really in many ways are the important part of the structure. There's more prominence given to the bigger ones, but actually the small ones have a very, very important role in their support of the big stones.

And that's how God builds his kingdom as well. Because many of the people you find in the Bible and in the history of the church were not really prominent in public view. They were not prominent in terms of being at the forefront of the kingdom of God.

They were actually supportive of those who were at the forefront, who really were prominent, who came to have certain fame or importance attached to their name simply because they were so visible in the ways in which the church advanced and the ways in which the gospel advanced.

But that little old lady at home who wasn't able to come to church and spent most of her time praying, well she is as important a part of the wall as anybody else.

whether it's a Spurgeon or a Martin Lloyd Jones or an Augustine or a Calvin, the little stones that prayed, that contributed to the building of the church under the leadership of such great men and women.

[23 : 13] In many respects they are as important as the big stones. And so is Mary and so are all the others in the Bible. And today it's not whether you're very prominent or noticed in the work of the kingdom that's important.

It's that you're there as part of the wall that God is building. And today if your role is just simply a supportive one where nobody really sees much of what you are in your life, much of what you are in the church, much of what you are in terms of your Christian life, it's a supportive life, well that's so important.

Don't think that that's anything other than as important as it was for Mary. He has looked on the humbly state of his servant. From behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

So God's choice is a reason for our praise. Secondly, God's method where he reverses human ideals. This really follows on from the first point of God's choice. From verse 51 to 53, he has shown his strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estates.

In other words, God reverses human ideals and the way that human beings tend generally to look at things. It's not those who have real status in society who have just been saying that God very often uses.

[24 : 41] What he's saying here is the proud, the mighty, the rich, they're all mentioned there by Mary. What has he done with them? He sent them away empty.

Because they refused to acknowledge God and God's gift of a savior. So they left empty. And we saw one of these encounters with Jesus that we're looking at in the evenings where we saw the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and was concerned what he might do, that he might be saved.

And Jesus says, well, you've got all these things, you've done all, you've kept these commandments as you've mentioned, but there's one thing that you lack, go and sell everything you have and come give these things to the poor and follow me.

And he went away massively disappointed. Imagine turning away from Jesus and as we saw there in Luke chapter 10, sorry, in Mark chapter 10, there's an incredible reference there to Jesus loved him.

Jesus looking upon him, loved him. And yet, away from that Jesus is where, that's really what happened, he made his way away from that, he turned his back on that Jesus.

[25 : 51] Of whom it is said there that he loved him? Why did he turn away from him? Because, Mark says, he had great possessions. He couldn't give away the things of this world so that he would have the better things of the world of salvation.

And here is Mary saying that's very often how it happens with the proud and the mighty and the rich. He has sent them empty away. That man who went away from Jesus, he had many things in his possession, but he was empty spiritually.

That's, of course, so important to Mary as well. He has scattered the proud, he's brought down the mighty, and he has filled the hungry with good things.

The rich and the mighty he has sent empty. In other words, but he says, he has exalted those of humbly state.

Now, when you come to be exalted by God, there is no decoration, there is no award or reward in this life that can possibly compare with that.

[27 : 07] We'll soon, God willing, be hearing about the New Year's honors list, where people have been given peerages, where people are given certain recognition for achievements in life, and some of them are very worthy, some of them are not.

That's just how it is. But that's the New Year's honors list. Well, here's God's honors list. The humble, he exalts.

That's the greatest honor you can have, to be exalted by God, to actually have his elevation, to have his honor placed upon you.

That's what Mary is saying. God's method is to reverse what's generally the human way of looking at things, and to exalt that which is humble.

Thirdly, there's God's power, verse 49, verse 51, he has shown strength with his arm, and he who is mighty has done great things for us.

[28 : 07] Well, we can only just pass over that very quickly, because God's power is absolutely essential to our salvation. That's why we praise the Lord for his power. We praise the Lord for his keeping of us.

We praise the Lord for the power he has displayed in providing salvation for us, the power that is seen in Christ, the power that took Lazarus back from the grave, the power by which Jesus himself rose from the dead, the power by which he was able to accomplish on the cross what no one else could do.

That's God's power, God's might. How can you live, how can I live without God's might living? And this is one of the great things that Paul often referred to, especially to the Ephesians when he spoke about the power of Christ's resurrection, that that's the power that's now working in his people. That's the power that's maintaining you from day to day as a Christian. It's not your own ability. It's not even the support of fellow Christians. It's the power of Christ's resurrection, the power of God, the might of the Almighty.

That's a humbling thing to realize that that's actually what makes me a Christian, what's brought me to recognize my need of God, what's opened my heart, what enables me to praise him.

[29 : 35] And here's one great reason for praise. Along with God's choice and God's method, there's God's power. Fourthly, there's God's mercy.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation in verse 50. Of course, all of this, she mentions a number of times that God is holy and holy.

It's his name in keeping with what we said to the children, hallowed be thy name. His name is holy, but the fact that God's name is holy is not in any way displacing the fact that he's mercy.

Remember the catechism which asks the question, into what is stated the fall bring mankind? Our fall in Adam. Fall brought mankind into an estate, or a state of sin and misery.

Sin and misery. Now, of course, remember that this is looking at things spiritually. This is looking at things in terms of our relationship with God, because very often when you look at things on the surface of life, it doesn't seem that there's much misery in people's lives, apart from those who obviously have a situation in life that makes them miserable, that really has fallen on hard times.

[30 : 51] But this is talking about the misery of our sinfulness, the misery of a broken relationship with God, the misery of being in such a situation and such a condition that has brought dishonor upon God and upon his name.

The fall brought us into a state of sin, guilt, and misery, misery for ourselves, because we don't have life. We don't have access to life in our state of sinfulness until we come to know God as our Savior and how in Jesus Christ we have our misery turned to joy and turned to that satisfaction of soul that you only find by knowing Christ as your very own Savior, to rejoice in him as your Savior. And it's that mercy of God that looks at our misery and looks at our plight and comes to provide a solution and salvation for us.

Remember how well it's expressed in Exodus chapter 3 where God is saying to Moses as he's about to give him instruction as to what he's going to do as the leader of the people and lead them out of Egypt, out of their bondage.

Well, he says there in chapter 3 of Exodus in verses 7 to 8, I have looked upon the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and I've come down to rescue them.

[32 : 19] You see there's the eye of pity, the eye of mercy. There is God looking at people in their misery, the misery of their entrapment in Egypt, just as a picture for you of your entrapment and your bondage to sin and under the mastery and the slave driver that is sin.

God is saying, I pity that. I pity these people. They brought it on themselves, but my mercy is drawn out towards them. That's really what Mary is magnifying the Lord for.

Not only God's choice and God's method and God's power, but God's mercy. God's mercy that moved him to act for the rescue of his people.

And finally, God's faithfulness. Find that in verses 54 to 55. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever. In other words, she's really saying there, I'm praising the Lord because he has remembered his covenant promises. A long, long way back from where Mary is there in history, a long way back to Abraham.

[33 : 34] And it's been a long time since these promises were given to Abraham and all the way through the Old Testament. But now they've come to be fulfilled. The promise that a Savior would come, would be born and be the deliverer of his people.

And Mary knows this is now what is happening through me. And I am praising God that he has actually remembered Israel to help.

And to help, incidentally, means to lift up. Because when God helps you, he doesn't leave you in the same position. He lifts you up. And it's always good to remember that and all the time has gone.

But Psalm 3, for example, shows how this is so important even on an individual level as well. Where Sam of David, where David is saying in relation to his foes, how many are his foes.

But he says, you, O Lord, while his foes are rising against him and are saying of his soul, there's no salvation for this man in God. But, he says, you, O Lord, are a shield about me.

[34 : 41] My glory, and the lifter of my head. When your head's down, when you find it hard to lift up your head, when you're depressed, when you're cast down, when you're anxious, here is God saying, I know all about that.

And if you look to me, in helping you, I will raise you up. I will lift up your head. I will remember you in my covenant promises.

And I will be what no one else can be to you. And that word remembrance is also, of course, important. The thief on the cross later on in Luke's gospel in chapter 23.

Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. The Lord remembers his promises, and he's always faithful to them.

But when we come to pray, we can rightly pray, Lord, remember me. Remember your covenant, your promises, and remember me in them.

[35 : 57] Because wherever we are in this world, if we're in God's diary, then we're safe. Within God's remembrance is life, security, refuge, help.

In God's diary, we're always safe, whatever else happens. two important elements of praise, five good reasons for praising God.

May we find that they are repeated often in our own life, too. May God bless these words to us. Let's conclude now by singing. Once again singing, this time Psalm 149.

149. The tune is Bishop Thorpe. That's on page 450. Singing verses 1 to 5. Praise ye the Lord. Unto him sing a new song. And his praise in the assembly of his saints. In sweet psalms do ye raise. Let Israel in his maker joy. Unto him praises sing.

[37 : 07] Let all that Zion's children are be joyful. And their king. Verses 1 to 5. To God's praise. Praise ye the Lord.

Unto him sing. A new song of his praise.

In the assembly of his saints. In sweet psalms do ye raise.

Let Israel in his maker joy. And to him praise ye the Lord.

And to him praise ye sing. Let all that Zion's children are be joyful in their king.

[38 : 20] O let them on to his great name. O let them on to his great name. Give praise his sin the dance.

Let them with timbrel and with heart. His songs his praise.

His praise. And to him. His praise. For God. What a pleasure. Take in those.

That his own people be. And he with his salvation.

The meek will beautify. And in his glory excellent.

[39 : 33] Let all his saints rejoice. Let them to him.

Upon their face. A Lord lift up their voice.

I'll go to the door on my left after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father. And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

